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A POLICY-MAKING SIMULATION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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HUNTINGTON TWO COMPUTER PROJECT

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1 April 1972

The work of the Huntington Two Computer Project is partially supported by the National Science Foundation, Grant GW-5883.

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POLICY

Subject Areas:	Government, Civics, Political Science, Economics, Urban Studies
Specific Topic:	Interest group conflict and governmental policy making
Abstract:	A simulation game that consists of a socio-economic model of the American society, six interest group roles, and a simulated decision-making process. The computer program provides up-dated information regarding the current state of American society to be used by the interest group representatives when making decisions regarding which governmental policies to support or oppose. (For 6 to 50 participants.)
Grade Level:	9 - 12
Coordinated Computer Program:	POLICY
Computer Language:	BASIC
Special Language Features Used:	None
Description of the Program:	The computer program POLICY serves as a model of American society in this simulation game. As suggested in the flow chart (Figure 1), interest group role players input to the program the magnitude of support or opposition they wish to direct toward 14 policies. The program stores 18 socioeconomic indicators which, in toto, give a picture of the health of American society. Each of these indicators has been assigned initial values. When a policy is adopted, the program will generate new values for the 18 indicators. The new values then reflect the state of the society following the adoption of the policy or policies. Even when no one policy gains enough support among the participants, the program will generate new values for the indicators. These values, while not reflecting the adoption of a policy by the government, reflect the state of the socioeconomic system as it would have developed over a period of real time.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

POLICY is a simulation game which reflects the impact various interest groups have on the policy formation process at the federal level. The computer performs two functions in POLICY:

1. It serves as the federal government and responds to the pressure placed upon it by the interest groups. When a predetermined threshold of support has been amassed in favor of a particular policy, the federal government will adopt the policy.

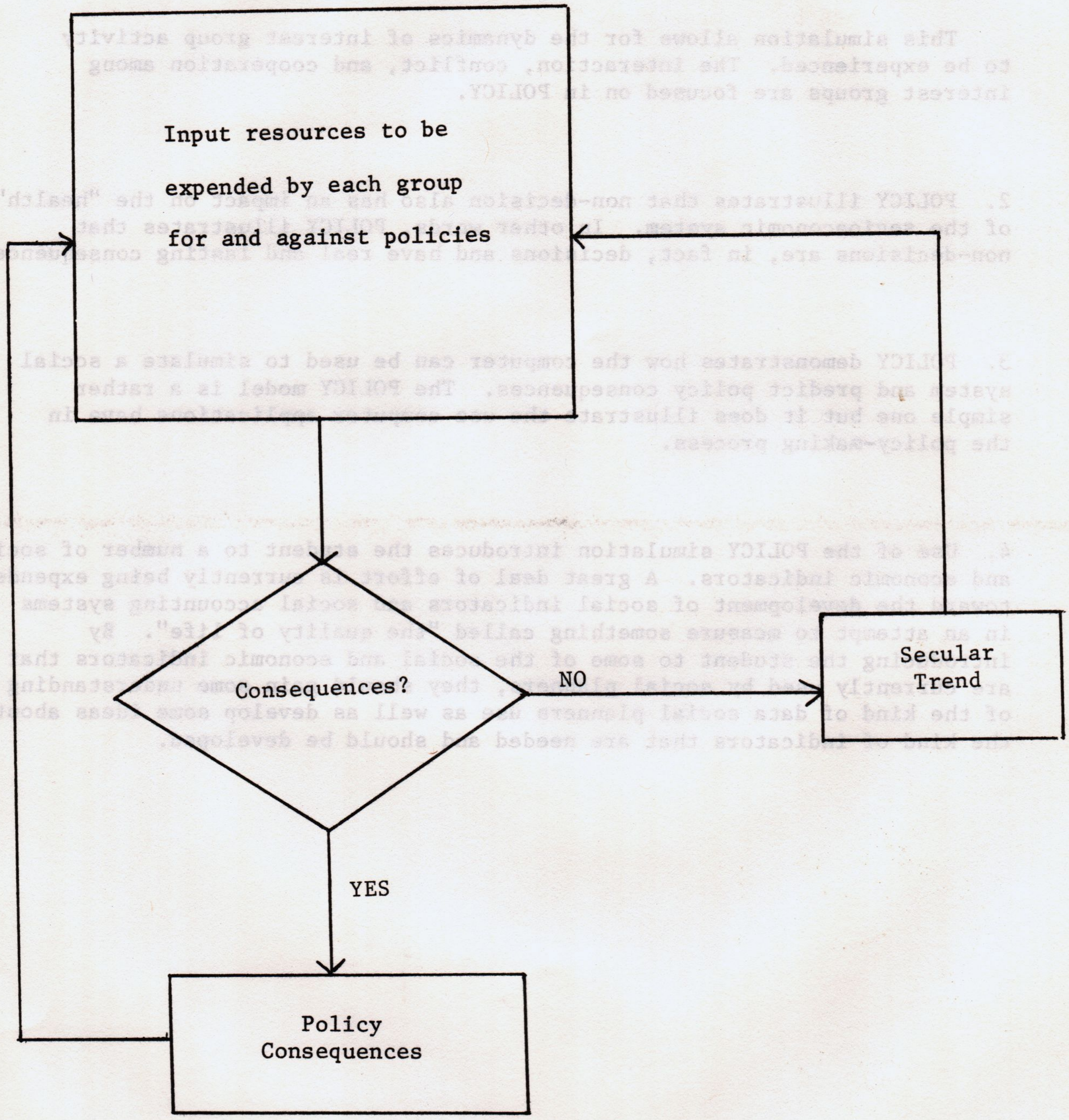
2. It serves as a model of American society as reflected in 18 socioeconomic indicators.

As illustrated in the flow chart (Figure 1) interest group role players input the magnitude of support of opposition they wish to direct toward 14 policies. (See Sample Run.) The computer program stores 18 socioeconomic indicators selected to give a picture of the current "health" of American society. Each of these indicators has been assigned initial values (current as of the beginning of 1972). When a policy is supported by enough influence units (set to 101 in the program) the government will adopt it and the new values for the indicators will be printed out. These new values then reflect the state of the society following the adoption of the policy or policies.

Even when no one policy gains enough support among the participant groups thus causing the government to remain inactive, the program will generate new values for the indicators. These values, while not reflecting the adoption of a policy by the government, reflect the state of the socioeconomic system as it would have developed over a period of one year.

POLICY Flow Chart

The chart below shows the steps involved in playing *POLICY*.


Input resources to be expended by each group for and against policies
Consequences?
NO
Secular Trend
YES
Policy Consequences

(Figure 1)

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

1. Interest groups play an important role in the American political policy-making process. Their activity often has an impact on the policies the federal government adopts. Yet despite the activity they generate in the legislative as well as executive branches of government our study of them often involves a very static consideration of their positions and activities.

This simulation allows for the dynamics of interest group activity to be experienced. The interaction, conflict, and cooperation among interest groups are focused on in POLICY.

2. POLICY illustrates that non-decision also has an impact on the "health" of the socioeconomic system. In other words, POLICY illustrates that non-decisions are, in fact, decisions and have real and lasting consequences.

3. POLICY demonstrates how the computer can be used to simulate a social system and predict policy consequences. The POLICY model is a rather simple one but it does illustrate the use computer applications have in the policy-making process.

4. Use of the POLICY simulation introduces the student to a number of social and economic indicators. A great deal of effort is currently being expended toward the development of social indicators and social accounting systems in an attempt to measure something called "the quality of life". By introducing the student to some of the social and economic indicators that are currently used by social planners, they should gain some understanding of the kind of data social planners use as well as develop some ideas about the kind of indicators that are needed and should be developed.

PLAN FOR USING POLICY

Preparatory Activities:

Several class periods prior to the actual use of the computer simulation model should be devoted to activities such as those listed below:

1. Discuss the nature of interest group politics in the United States. Topics such as how interest groups influence government, how groups are formed, why interest groups develop, how government responds to interest groups, how interest groups deal with one another, etc., should be considered at this time.

2. Have students research the interest group to which they have been assigned. Have them attempt to answer questions such as: How does this interest group go about attempting to influence the government; How much do they spend attempting to influence the government; How effective are they when they attempt to influence the government; What groups are their natural allies; What groups do they often come in conflict with; etc.

You may wish to list some of these questions on a sheet of paper and give them to the students before the simulation is started. You may then wish to discuss the results of their answers to the questions both before and after the simulation.

3. Ask a representative of an interest group to come to class to discuss his job. Lobbyists are often very willing to engage in this kind of discussion with students since they feel that it gives them an opportunity to engage in public education regarding their particular interest group.

4. Your local legislator may be asked to come into the class to discuss interest group politics from his point of view. It may be worthwhile to invite the legislator and lobbyist to come on the same day.

5. Introduce the use of socioeconomic indicators. Discuss the questions: What do the indicators tell us? What are they indicators of?

6. Make sure that the students understand the way in which the game is played. Go over the rules with them. (Should you feel the rules need to be changed to suit the needs of your class, discuss these changes. The game has been structured so that rule changes can be made very easily.)

USE OF POLICY

POLICY can be played by as few as 6 people or by as many players as space will allow--about 20 to 30 seems to be the best size. Because the success of the game depends on the student's ability to play his role consistently, it might be best that students be assigned (or allowed to volunteer for) roles which are comfortable or "natural" in terms of their own values. At the same time, there may be some merit in urging a few students to adopt unfamiliar roles.

Once the students understand the rules and structure of the game, it will take about four classroom periods.

You should determine how long to devote to the actual play of the game. It seems that four classroom periods seems to be about the best.

Students should study the instructions and especially the Policies and Indicators, in advance of playing the first round. You should duplicate the necessary forms (Resource Allocation Form) and distribute them so that they are in the hands of the students before the first round is begun.

During the play of the game each student should wear a name tag identifying him as belonging to a particular group. Since they will be moving around the room attempting to gain support for their policies other participants need some way of identifying them. Three by five cards work well as name tags.

The discussion of how the POLICY game is played is contained in the Student Handbook. In addition to the information given about the game, several additional points need to be stressed:

1. Some students may find it difficult to engage in role-playing. They will come to you and say that they do not think they can do it. Encourage them to act out the role as realistically as possible. Most of this initial fear will be overcome very quickly. Having the students study the groups they represent before the game is played will also help them overcome this fear.

2. It is impossible to foresee every question that students might have about the game. As the controller of the simulated environment, use your best judgement when attempting to answer the questions that are bound to come up.

3. The program has been defined so that it takes an allocation of 101 or more influence points before the government will enact the policy. This means that no group acting by itself has enough influence to cause the government to act; negotiation and bargaining are therefore necessary. We suggest that you do not tell the students what this number is. They should be able to guess its value after one or two periods. This corresponds to reality in the sense that interest groups seldom know the exact point at which government will respond to their demands.

Should you feel that this threshold is too high or too low, change it to suit your needs. (Instructions are included in the Resource Materials.)

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Players of POLICY will want to discuss the results of the simulation at some length. You may wish to begin the discussion by again bringing up the questions that were mentioned in the Preparatory Activities section of the Handbook. In addition, you may wish to:

1. Compare your results with "reality" in the outside world.

2. Each group might be asked:

   a) If I were, in fact, a spokesman for the group I represented would the group continue to support me in the light of my behavior in POLICY? Did we accomplish enough to satisfy the interest group? Did I behave in the way they would expect? How closely did my behavior approximate the "real" behavior of lobbyists? Did I find it necessary to depart from "normal" behavior in order to cope with the demands of other players? Did I find that my personal feelings sometimes conflicted with the demands of my role? Why? Did these conflicts affect the course of the game?

   b) If I felt that this simulation did not lead to an accurate reflection of "reality", can I pinpoint the reasons for the problem?

   c) How would I change these rules or other arrangements if I were writing my own game?

   d) Did any of these trends or indicators show real promise of casting some light on "real" situations? Why or why not?

   e) What, if anything, do I believe that I have learned from playing POLICY?

   f) Use the evaluation questions contained in the Resource Materials Packet.

SUGGESTED DAILY SCHEDULE

In order to facilitate the use of POLICY, a day-by-day account of the steps involved in playing POLICY is listed below. This account is meant to be suggestive of activities and procedures rather than exhaustive. If some other procedure would be more appropriate in your situation, you will not destroy the simulation by discarding these suggestions.

First Day

1. Hand out Participant's Instructions to the students.

2. Briefly outline the structure of the simulation: Interest group interaction, role playing, role of the computer, etc.

3. Hold a class discussion and discuss the simulation. In particular, discuss the following:

   a) Policies -- Why do we want them adopted?
   How do we know a policy has an impact?
   How do we read the impact?

   b) Indicators -- What are the indicators indicators of?
   If we know what effect policies will have, why don't we all agree?

   c) Interest groups -- Why do different groups support different policies?

4. Assign students to groups. This may be done in a number of different ways.

5. Assignment: Be prepared to answer the question: Why do the groups favor the policies they do?

Note: You may wish to spend more than one day dealing with these topics.

Second Day

1. This will be the first day devoted to the play of the game.

2. Groups should meet and select a chairman, spokesman, and recorder.

3. Begin the simulation exercise.

Third Day

1. Continue simulation exercise.

Fourth Day

1. You may wish to devote this day to a discussion or debate of the policies. The structure of this interchange can take a variety of forms. For example, you may wish to stage a formal debate with opposing groups debating each other with one of the policies serving as the proposition. You may stage an open discussion in which students simulate testifying before a congressional committee which is considering one of the policies.

As you can readily see, you may want to spend more time engaging in this type of activity. You may want to wait until the simulation exercise is complete and then stage these discussions and debates or you may wish to have them before you begin the simulation.

Fifth Day

1. Continue simulation exercise.

Sixth Day

1. After the simulation exercise has been completed, you should spend time de-briefing the students. Use the questions suggested in the Follow-up Activities as a basis for discussion.

You will find that this is probably the most valuable portion of the entire exercise and should not, therefore, be neglected.

2. You may also want to use the Evaluation Materials included in the Resource Materials at this time.

POLICY

RESOURCE ALLOCATION FORM

INSTRUCTIONS: Use this form to indicate the number of the policy to be supported or opposed and the number of resource units to be used. Also provide a brief description of the reasons for your support or opposition.

GROUP NAME ______________________

GROUP RECORDER ________________

PERIOD __________

POLICY NUMBER __________ SUPPORT or OPPOSITION (Circle one.)

NUMBER OF UNITS __________

REASONS:

SAMPLE

APPENDIX

Recently some concern has been expressed over the use of social process simulations in the social studies classroom. Very basically, this concern is related to the "subjective" nature of all social process simulations. It has been suggested that, since the simulation results "come out of a computer," they tend to take on a certain degree of authority in the minds of the students. In other words, students will come to believe that the "subjective" picture of reality contained in the simulation model is an actual and accurate picture of the real world.

In order to help overcome this tendency, Joseph McGrath, a social studies teacher in Locust Valley High School, Locust Valley, New York, makes the following suggestions:

> It is important that during the follow-up activities if not before, students be made aware of the tenuous nature of the model. Prediction in the social sciences is an art, not a science. Student recognition of this fact should certainly be one of the major objectives of using POLICY. While the secular trends built into the model are a rough average of the last few years, the changes resulting from the adoption of the various policies are little more than knowledgeable guesses. These guesses are based upon the best available information and, we would like to believe, a considerable amount of common sense, but they are guesses nonetheless.
>
> One particularly valuable exercise would be to take one indicator, such as national crime rate, and have the students estimate how each of the policies might affect it, using a +, -, or 0 notation for positively, negatively, or not at all. Compute a class average which would indicate roughly, by the number of +'s or -'s, the magnitude of the change. Then give the class the actual values listed in the model and discuss possible reasons for the differences. This could be done for any or all of the indicators. By inputting new data, the teacher could then change the model in accordance with the class estimates. Policies that had been passed during the original playing of POLICY could then be run again so that the students could see the difference.